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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001072

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SUBJECT: TURKISH YOUTH PARTY MANEUVERING FOR MERGER

REF: ANKARA 1070 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) As the constitutional crisis over the presidency begins to wind down and general elections for parliament move into gear, political parties across the partisan spectrum are maneuvering for advantage. The recent decision by the center-right True Path and Motherland parties to unite has been followed by rumors of an "understanding" between Deniz Baykal's Republic People's Party (CHP) and the remnants of the late Bulent Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP). Jumping into the equation is the Youth party (Genc), businessman Cem Uzan's party, which garnered over seven percent in the last election on an anti-western platform and, according to their own polling, currently has about nine percent popular support.

¶2. (C) Emin Sirin, the sole member of parliament from Youth, claims that the party has formally offered to join with CHP and a final decision will be taken by May 11. According to Sirin, CHP Leader Baykal said he "could not ignore" Youth's strong popular support and thus was seriously interested in a merger of some sort. However, the demand which Youth has levied as the cost of collaboration -- an up-front commitment for the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs -- is likely to cause heartburn for Baykal and many others in the CHP.

¶3. (C) Reviewing the political crisis of the past two weeks, Sirin was scathing and ecumenical in his criticism. He places primary blame for the crisis on the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which "foolishly" overreached in trying to put FM Gul in the presidency. This would have put AKP in monopoly control of not only parliament, government and the presidency, but also of the key municipalities -- an imbalance that neither the military nor the general public want. At the same time, he described the Turkish General Staff as "out of line" in issuing its harshly worded statement. He also characterized the decision by the Constitutional Court as political and noted that it had now become virtually impossible to elect a president. Direct election of the president, along with a reduction of executive power, is a step that Sirin supports, but he surmised that it had become such a partisan lightening rod that the necessary constitutional changes would have to be delayed for now and dealt with by the next Parliament.

¶4. (C) Comment: Uzan, the only party leader to snub FM Gul when Gul made his initial round of party calls as AK's presidential candidate, is pouring substantial family money into glitzy TV advertising. He will hitch his populist

party's wagon to whichever train appears most likely to take him to parliament. His desire to get back at AKP stems from the State Deposit and Insurance Fund's takeover of nearly all of his family's corporate empire after the collapse of the family bank due to massive fraud, which cost the Turkish taxpayer \$6 billion. The Uzans also bilked US firm Motorola out of \$2 billion. None of this has made a dent in Cem Uzan's popularity -- indeed, it has likely increased his status as a maverick. End comment.

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